

HYDROGRAD

“Our only real idea was to make a kick-ass rock and roll album,” says Corey Taylor, lead singer of Stone Sour. “Let’s lean back, let the songs do the talking, and make the best rock and roll playlist, mix tape, that’s ever been made. That was the only thing we held to, and everything after that was so fucking easy.”

And with this attitude, the band came up with the fifteen songs on *Hydrograd*, displaying a range of sounds and styles that Taylor describes as “a real coming-out party for Stone Sour.” It’s not like the band is starting from zero—its five previous albums have sold more than two million copies, and earned them nine Top Ten Mainstream Rock singles (including ”Bother” and “Through Glass,” which were certified gold and platinum respectively) and three Grammy nominations. But this time around, Stone Sour—Taylor, guitarists Josh Rand and Christian Martucci, bassist Johny Chow, and drummer Roy Mayorga—expands into new musical territory with supercharged impact.

The group’s last album release was the two-part *House of Gold & Bones* albums in 2012 and 2013, an elaborate narrative which was explored more extensively in a comic book series published by Dark Horse; it was a widely acclaimed but creatively demanding project. “I put so much in those albums, I realized that it kind of took the enjoyment out of it,” says Taylor. “I saw the scope we had captured, but it was exhausting. I’m very proud of what we did, but I don’t need to do another concept album again.

“This time,” he continues, “it was so liberating to just say, ‘If it sounds good, go for it.’ It loosened everything up, and it was so positive and fun in the studio that it raised the energy level a million-fold.”

After the *House of Gold & Bones* albums, Stone Sour announced plans to record a trio of covers EPs—but after releasing two (*Meanwhile in Burbank* and *Straight Outta Burbank*), they were more excited to work on the original songs they were building up than to make the third EP. “We had so much material that we would pick five songs to concentrate on, and demo those together as a band,” says Taylor. “We did that four times and had 19 great songs. And out of the gate, we were so far ahead of the game because we knew the ideas, knew how they would sound live. We took a different approach because we were all so stoked about these songs.”

*Hydrograd* delivers the heavy, thunderous, metal-edged stuff usually associated with Stone Sour—songs like “Whiplash Pants” and “Taipei Person/Allah Tea” are full of what Taylor calls “combustible moments.” But other tracks—like “Mercy,” “Song #3,” and “Thank God It’s Over”—are more straight-up rock and roll, still aggressive but built on solid melodies and hooks.

“Those songs sound like if Alice in Chains grew up on the Sunset Strip,” says the singer, who won the 2013 Revolver Golden Gods award for Best Vocalist. “We’ve been talking about getting back to that big hard rock for years, but we really embraced it. Everybody mistook that we’re a metal band that plays rock and roll, when it’s really the other way around.”

Other songs, though, extend Stone Sour even further, most notably the powerful ballad “St. Marie,” which features a country-style pedal steel guitar. “That song is pretty special to me,” says Taylor. “I write stuff like that all the time, but I get self-conscious about playing it for anybody. But I played it for the guys and they just flipped out, It originally had more of an Eagles vibe, but Josh suggested a slide or pedal steel and Jay knew a pedal player who came in and just nailed it. The soul of the song really came out and it became so much more than I thought it could. It fits so well—every song has its place on the album.”

*Hydrograd* concludes with the sweeping, Pink Floydian ambition of “When the Fever Broke,” based on music written by Rand. “In the studio, I played piano and we used this cool effect to get it out of standard vibe, which triggered all these cool sonic ideas,” says Taylor. “We wanted an epic feel, wanted it to resolve at the end with this idea that nobody ever really goes home, so you’ve got to hold it closely in your heart.”

Since the *House of Gold & Bones* albums, Stone Sour went through some line-up changes, with Martucci and Chow joining the group. “Christian and Johny are two of the best dudes I’ve ever had the privilege to play with,” says Taylor, “and as writers, they came in with such great material that it made us step our game up. They blended so well with what we were coming up with, we didn’t lose a step.

“We laughed every day—they’re big fucking dorks like we are! And they’re also as dedicated as we are. We worked six days a week, came in early, left late every day, and at the end, none of us were burnt, we were all just bummed that we had to leave.”

At one point in “Somebody Stole My Eyes,” Taylor (who has written four best-selling books in the last decade) manages to convey his own worldview in one phrase—“I’m the rock and roll Han Solo” he sings.

“I’m a *Star Wars* fan from way back,” he explains, “and I’ve always identified with those characters, the scoundrels looking for redemption. Everybody was fighting to be like Luke Skywalker, but I wanted to be Han Solo. That’s my archetype—the guy who’s a little beat up, but you could always rely on him.”

It’s almost unbelievable that 2017 marks the 25th anniversary of Stone Sour’s formation, and that *Hydrograd* represents a new peak in such an extensive career. “We’ve done a lot, we’ve come a long way,” says Corey Taylor, reflecting on his band’s accomplishments. “You’re definitely humbled by the fact that so many people around the world support and love you, that’s a gift. I’m proud of our history, but I’m not really tethered to it.

“I’m always thinking about what’s next, what’s the next great song I get to write and record with these guys? I’m not ready to turn around, because I’m still pointed in the direction of the future.”

